

Tether by CrackingtoastGromit

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Language: English

Characters: Axel (Stranger Things), Bob Newby, Dottie (Stranger Things), Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Funshine (Stranger Things), Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Kali Prasad, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mick (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Original Female Character(s), Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Bob Newby, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Will Byers/Original Female Character(s)

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Summary:

It's been almost a year since Faye Wheeler's best friend Will Byers came back from the Upside Down. Now it's up to Faye, her twin brother Mike and their friends to try to get back to normal- whatever that means. But how do you get back to normal when your life is anything but? (OC x Will Byers) (Eleven x Mike Wheeler)

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

The idea for this story came to me after I saw a lookalike comparison between Finn Wolfhard and Lauren Mayberry- they could be twins. Thus, I started thinking what *Stranger Things* would be like if Mike had a twin sister, and now here we are. I've tried to stick as close to canon as I can without it being repetitive. The story takes place during season 2 of *Stranger Things*, with flashbacks to season 1 (flashback sequences are italicized). Any feedback is greatly appreciated. Rated T for language.

Faye Wheeler lived a normal life, with a normal family in the unremarkable town of Hawkins, Indiana. She had a mom, a dad, an older sister, a younger sister and a twin brother. She went to school, she liked to draw, and she played with her friends. Up until the age of 12, the most interesting thing to ever happen to her was when she and her brother Mike dug up what they thought was a dinosaur tooth in their backyard, but it turned out to be from an alligator. Aside from this, nothing untoward or unexpected ever happened.

Until the night of November 6th 1983.

The vanishing of Will Byers was all anyone was talking about. Phrases like *Missing child* didn't belong in the same sentence as Hawkins, Indiana. Things like that just didn't happen here. That was for the big cities and the movie screens. But it did happen. Will Byers had disappeared and nobody knew where he'd gone. Not his family, not the police, and not Faye- his best friend. As it turned out, Will's disappearance was the catalyst for a series of very untoward and very unexpected events. Ones which would prevent Faye Wheeler from ever describing herself as normal again.

December 1983

"Whoa whoa whoa, that's not it is it?" Dustin exclaims, voicing what everyone in the room is thinking.

Mike shakes his head "No there's a medal ceremony-"

"Oh a medal ceremony?!" Dustin cuts him off, words dripping with sarcasm.

"Yeah man, the campaign was way too short," Lucas chimes in.

"It was 10 hours!" Mike yells.

"But it doesn't make any sense!" Dustin insists.

Mike scowls at him "It makes sense!"

"You left so many plot holes!" says Faye.

Faye, Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Will have spent the last 10 hours embarking on a celebratory Dungeons & Dragons campaign- their first since Will had been found after going missing. Faye doesn't understand how every other girl her age doesn't like D&D- it's the best game ever. Even if her stupid brother messed up the story. She's just glad to have their party reunited.

The arrival of Will's brother Jonathan silences their bickering. Will gathers up his things and says goodbye as Dustin and Lucas start play-fighting. Just as Will leaves the room, Faye notices his watch still sitting on the table. She picks it up and hurries after him, narrowly avoiding Dustin's elbow hitting her in the face as she passes.

"Will! Wait up, you forgot your watch!"

Will is waiting by the front door, Jonathan having been intercepted by Faye's sister Nancy. He smiles when he sees her.

"Oh yeah, thanks" he says, returning the watch to his wrist. He then looks at Faye with a sheepish expression "Actually, I kinda left it on purpose."

Faye frowns at him "Why?"

Will opens his backpack and pulls out a folded piece of paper "Because I wanted to give you this. I thought the others might get mad because we did Secret Santa and you're not supposed to get anyone else presents."

Faye takes the paper, raising her eyebrows "Not like you to break the rules."

"Yeah but this doesn't technically count as a present because I didn't buy it," Will grins.

Laughing at his warped logic, Faye opens out the paper and sees it is one of Will's drawings. Of the group, she and Will are the only ones who really like to draw so it's something they often do together. This particular drawing is of them, the whole party, in various heroic poses. They're wearing capes in each of their favorite colors (Faye's being purple) and brandishing swords. It isn't until Faye gets to the last figure on the page that she realizes who it is.

"Is that..."

"Eleven," Will answers "Yeah. I wasn't sure exactly what she looked like, but I know you guys really miss her so I thought she should be in the picture."

At that moment Faye feels two contradictory emotions; a surge of affection for Will and a pang of sadness for her lost friend. The appearance of Eleven had been as unexpected as the disappearance of Will. They had found the strange, quiet girl out in Mirkwood and snuck her back to their house without their parents' knowledge. Faye is still impressed they managed to pull that off. While they had doubts at first, Eleven soon became one of them and helped them get Will back. Having grown up surrounded by boys, El was the first girl friend Faye ever had and she misses her terribly. Almost as much as Mike does.

"Thank you, I love it" Faye smiles.

Will shrugs, looking embarrassed. He always gets embarrassed at compliments "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," reciprocates Faye. Spontaneously, she leans in and gives Will a hug. They aren't a particularly touchy-feely group, but sometimes, when the moment calls for it, a hug, a pat on the back or even holding someone's hand is acceptable. Will returns the hug and for the millionth time, Faye feels a flood of gratitude that she has her best friend back.

Jonathan clears his throat loudly and the two spring apart. Both of their older siblings are smirking at them "You ready Will?"

"Yeah," Will nods.

Something suddenly occurs to Faye "Hey, how did you know I'd be the one to notice your watch?"

Will laughs "I'll give you five dollars right now if Dustin and Lucas aren't down there fighting and Mike isn't sulking."

Faye joins in the laughter- Will is smarter than people give him credit for. She waves goodbye and the Byers' leave, Will's drawing still clutched in her hand.

"Soo," Nancy singsongs "You and Will?"

Faye feels her cheeks flush, but two can play at that game "You and Jonathan?"

The smirk drops from Nancy's face "What? No he's, we're just friends."

Faye raises her eyebrows, muttering "Sure" under her breath as she goes upstairs to the bedroom she shares with Mike. Grabbing a pin from the desk, she puts Will's drawing up on the wall next to her bed- the newest addition to the collage of artwork already on display. As she goes back to join the others, Faye realizes she hadn't denied Nancy's insinuation that she and Will like each other.

October 1984

The streets of Hawkins are aglow with candles and Jack-O'-Lanterns, and the town's Halloween preparations are in full-swing. For one small group of Middle Schoolers, there isn't a costume or scary mask in existence more terrifying than what they had come face to face

with the previous year. However, they are doing their best to follow instructions and get on with their lives as best they can. And for a while, it seems to be working.

Faye, Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Will have been looking forward to Halloween even more than usual. Ever since they saw the movie *Ghostbusters* over the summer, they knew exactly what their costumes were going to be. There had been some dispute over who got to be who (Mike and Lucas fighting over the role of Venkman), but eventually they came to an agreement. Faye is to be Dana Barrett- the female lead- but her mother says Faye is too young to wear Dana's iconic, albeit skimpy, orange dress. Faye begged and pleaded for weeks, insisting that the only other female character was Janine Melnitz and there was no way she was being the boys' secretary. Eventually her mom relented, on the condition she would tweak the dress to "make it more appropriate."

With Halloween still a few days away, the party decide to spend an evening at the arcade. Faye has been saving up her allowance, but Mike spent all of his on sweets, as usual. Faye watches in amusement as her brother pulls up each of the couch cushions searching for change.

"Why did you spend your allowance on candy when it's Halloween in three days?" Faye demands "We're about to get tons of it, *for free!*"

"Well what was I supposed to do until then?" Mike snaps, tossing aside the final cushion. Suddenly his face lights up and he dashes from the room, his footsteps thundering up the stairs. A minute later Faye hears a shriek that can only be Nancy, followed by Mike running back down. He reappears stuffing fistfuls of change into his pockets then grabs Faye's wrist.

"We gotta go!"

Mike pulls her through the house and out the back door as Nancy pursues them, screaming Mike's name. Faye frowns "Did you take her money?"

"I'll pay her back!" Mike yells.

The twins grab their bikes and jump on just as Nancy bursts through the backdoor. She runs after them for a few paces, but quickly gives up and settles for shouting "Asshole!" at Mike. Faye shakes her head.

"You are so dead when we get back."

"She'll have to catch me first," Mike retorts.

Dustin and Lucas are waiting for them outside the arcade and Ms. Byers' car pulls up a few minutes later. Ever since Will had been found, his mom barely lets him out of her sight. He isn't allowed to bike anywhere and he can't stay out after dark, even at weekends. Before, the group would do pretty much whatever they wanted and as long as they were back for dinner their parents didn't mind, but now Will's mom has to know exactly where they are, what they are doing and when they'll be home. Faye can't blame her really, they all thought they'd lost Will for good last year and none of them want to go through that again.

"What's taking so long?" asks Dustin.

"His mom is probably just making sure he's okay," Faye shrugs.

Eventually, Will gets out of the car and runs over to join them. Dustin hastily ushers everyone inside, desperate to try and beat the top score on *Dragon's Lair*- something he's been trying and failing to do for weeks. Faye bumps Will's shoulder playfully.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, my mom's just driving me a little crazy," Will admits.

Faye nods "Mine too."

"At least yours doesn't burst in on you while you're peeing because she didn't know where you were for two seconds."

Faye grimaces "My mom doesn't do *that*, but she did burst in on Nancy and Steve yesterday..."

Will's eyes widen "You mean?"

"Yep."

"Blurgh, gross!" he shudders.

"Steve was staying for dinner as well and my mom was just giving him this death glare the whole time, it was hilarious," Faye smirks.

Will laughs heartily and Faye smiles at how happy and relaxed he looks. It's a rare look for him these days. When he was first brought back from the Upside Down, everyone was so relieved and excited to see him that no-one really noticed anything was wrong. But after Christmas the worry crept in; if ever Will was too quiet, if he came to school with bags under his eyes, if he was even a minute late for class- they'd panic. Their brains would start going haywire and throwing out wild, ridiculous theories about Will's well-being, demanded answers to questions they dared not ask. Is Will okay? Has he been weird today, do you think? Why does he look so tired all the time? He didn't finish his lunch, do you think he's sick? What if it happens again? What if the Demogorgon comes back?

Each and every one of them were guilty of it. Will knew it too, and he hated it. Faye could tell. They were essentially treating him like a baby, not like a friend. Faye tried extremely hard to reel in the over-protective instinct, to just go back to the way things were before. It wasn't easy, but she liked to think she managed better than the others. Maybe it was because she was a girl; her mom said girls notice things boys don't, that they're better at picking up on emotions. Maybe she was just better at picking up on Will's emotions. Whatever the reason, Faye is just glad whenever she sees Will smile, and even gladder when she is the cause of it.

The group do the rounds of their favorite games and are shocked to discover there is a new high-scorer in town by the name of MADMAX. Whoever they are, they've knocked Dustin off the top-spot in almost every game- much to his outrage. Dustin demands to know who this mysterious MADMAX is, but Keith- an arcade employee who is rude to everyone and never appears to wash his hair- refuses to tell them without something in return.

"No way! You're not getting a date with her!" says Mike when he realizes what Keith is hinting at.

Lucas turns to him "Mike, come on just get him the date!"

"I'm not prostituting my sister!" Mike snaps.

"But it's for a good cause," Lucas insists.

Faye glowers at Keith "Firstly, Nancy already has a boyfriend. And secondly, even if she didn't, I have heard her call you creepy."

A grin stretches across Keith's face "So she talks about me, huh?"

"Unbelievable," Faye exclaims, throwing her hands up in resignation. Dustin continues to argue with Keith about MADMAX when Faye hears the door to the arcade jingle shut. She turns around and notices Will is missing.

"Mike," she whispers, not wanting to cause a scene. Mike glances over his shoulder and immediately sees what's wrong.

They look at each other with concern then head outside. Will is standing a few paces from the door with his back to them, staring off into the distance. He is unnaturally still, as if something has paralyzed him.

"Will?" Faye calls. Will doesn't respond.

"Will?" Mike tries. Still nothing.

Faye's heart jumps into her mouth. Mike shouts Will's name again, louder, and this time he spins around. He looks like he's seen a ghost.

"Are you okay?" Faye asks.

Will seems disoriented and keeps looking back out at the road opposite. "Yeah," he says eventually "I just needed some air."

Mike walks up and puts an arm around Will's shoulders "Come on, you're up on Dig Dug."

They escort Will back inside. Thankfully, Dustin and Lucas didn't even notice they left and are still trading insults with Keith. Will goes strangely quiet and Mike meets Faye's gaze with a worried

expression. Being twins, they have learnt to communicate without words.

What do we do? Mike's eyes ask.

I don't know Faye shrugs.

Mike inclines his head towards Will *Should we talk to him about it?*

Faye shakes her head *No, he won't like it.*

"Will! You're up man!" Dustin announces "Let's show this MADMAX who really runs things around here."

In no-time at all it's 9PM and Will's mom is outside. They bid him goodnight and Will waves then gets in the car and drives off. The rest of them unchain their bikes and head home- Mike's question comes the second Lucas turns into his driveway and he and Faye are alone.

"What happened with Will?"

"I have no idea," says Faye "He said he just needed air."

"So why didn't he turn around when we called him?" Mike reasons.

Faye frowns, trying to picture the scene again "It was like he was staring at something, like there was something out there we couldn't see."

Mike pauses "You don't think he saw the Demogorgon do you?"

"No," Faye answers immediately "Will's not stupid. If he saw that he would've told us."

"Well something's up," Mike states.

Faye can't dispute this, nor can she shake the uneasy feeling which comes over her.

2. Chapter 2

"Will!"

"Will where are you!"

"Will it's us!"

"Will!"

The rain is pelting down with a vengeance, the cold biting at their wet faces. Faye zips up her jacket as far as it will go and pulls her hood forward. She isn't giving up. She isn't going home until they find him.

It's almost pitch black, the moonlight obscured by a thousand tree branches twisting and interlocking overhead. Only the beams from their flashlights guide them as the four friends venture further into the woods.

"Will!" Faye yells for the hundredth time. She strains her ears, trying to pick out a human voice amidst the downpour. He has to be here. The Police Chief had found Will's bike by the side of the road next to the woods. Maybe he had been hit by a car? Maybe he wandered into the woods to find shelter because he was too injured to get home? Or maybe someone was chasing him and he came in here to hide. Whatever the case, this was the only place he could be- surely.

"Guys I really think we should turn back," Dustin announces.

Faye rounds on him "We're not going anywhere until we find him!"

"Seriously Dustin, you wanna be a baby? Then go home already!" snaps Lucas.

Dustin pauses before speaking again "You ever think Will went missing because he ran into something bad? And we're going to the exact same spot where he was last seen? And we have no weapons or anything?"

"Dustin shut up," Mike orders.

"I'm just saying, does that seem smart to you-"

"Shut up!"

Faye suddenly realizes why her brother has stopped. There is a rustling sound coming from their left. "D'you guys hear that?"

A twig snaps loudly and they all jump, shining their flashlights in the direction of the noise. Even with the light it's hard to make out shapes through the sheets of rain and deceptive shadows. Faye's arm is shaking. What if Dustin is right? What if something bad got Will? And now it was going to get them.

Something moves behind them and their breath hitches. They spin round and find a pair of eyes looking back at them, but they aren't Will's. A girl of approximately their age is standing before them clad only in a bright yellow t-shirt. She is soaked through and panting heavily, as if she's been running. Her feet are bare and her hair is cropped so short she almost looks like a boy.

"Who are you?" Lucas asks.

The girl doesn't speak.

"Are you lost?" Mike adds.

No response.

Faye raises her voice in case the girl can't hear properly "Have you seen our friend Will? We're looking for him."

Her eyes suddenly fix on Faye; the girl's mouth quivers as if she wants to speak, then all of a sudden she collapses and falls to the ground.

"Oh shit!" Dustin exclaims as they all surge forwards and bend down. "What's wrong with her?"

"I'm guessing Hypothermia, she doesn't even have shoes on!" Lucas observes.

"We gotta get her home, then we can call her parents, or a hospital," says Mike.

Faye turns to him "We can't go back! What about Will?"

"She could be dying!" Mike yells "Besides we've been looking for hours, if we stay out any longer mom will ground us until we're eighteen then we'll never be able to find him."

Faye wants to protest. Will could be lying unconscious twenty feet away. He could be in serious trouble- he needs them. But she looks down at the figure crumpled at their feet, helpless and shivering, and she realizes this girl needs them too.

"Okay."

Dustin and Mike lift up her small form and each put one of her arms around their shoulders. She's still conscious, but barely.

"Let's go," says Mike. Faye does one last sweep of the surrounding wood with her flashlight, then turns to follow the others.

The next morning at school, Faye and Will head to the lockers to retrieve their books for class. First period is Science with Mr. Clarke- the best teacher at Hawkins Middle School. Will seems brighter than he did last night and Faye can only hope whatever the problem was has gone away.

As Will opens his locker, a piece of paper flutters out which he plucks from the air. After glancing at it, Will balls it up and stuffs it into his pocket.

"What's that?" Faye asks.

"Nothing," Will mumbles.

Faye raises her eyebrows "Yeah right. D'you have a secret girlfriend we don't know about?"

"No."

"Then what?"

Will sighs and hands the paper to Faye who smooths out the creases until it's legible again. It's a newspaper cutting from just after Will was found; the headline reads 'The Boy Who Came Back to Life' and there's a photo of Will, but someone has written 'Zombie Boy' across

the article.

"What the fuck?" Faye exclaims "What sick freak would do this?"

"It doesn't matter," says Will.

"Yes it does!"

Will shrugs "It's not every day."

Faye stares at him "This has happened before?"

Will closes his eyes, clearly wishing he hadn't mentioned that part "Look, it happens and there's nothing I can do about it, so I'm just ignoring it."

Faye opens her mouth to argue, but forces the words back. She can see Will already starting to clam up and she doesn't want him to shut down completely. "Okay."

"Please don't tell the others," Will implores.

Faye nods and Will gives her a grateful smile "Thanks. Sometimes I feel like you're the only one who gets it."

"Gets what?"

Before Will can answer, the bell rings and they sprint down the hall to first period. In a very unexpected turn of events, the one and only MADMAX turns up in their class as a transfer student from California. And not only that, MADMAX is a girl. She has long red hair and the stereotypical California tan, quickly correcting Mr. Clarke when he calls her Maxine.

"No-one calls me Maxine, it's Max."

As Max takes her seat at the back of the room, the group all turn around to stare at her. Faye can't believe it; she's never met another girl who likes video games. Apparently video games are for boys and makeup is for girls. Faye thinks this is stupid. She doesn't see why people have to choose. Some evenings, Faye would go up to Nancy's room and her sister would put her hair in a French plait or paint her

nails- and others she would sit and play D&D in the basement with the boys for hours on end. Faye enjoyed both, even if the others made fun of her whenever she spent too much time doing "girl stuff."

The group observe Max with quiet fascination throughout the day, learning that in addition to playing video games, she also likes to skateboard- and she's good at it, too. California is full of hills, by all accounts, so it makes sense. After school they watch from a distance as Max practises tricks outside the History block.

"You realize this is kinda creepy," Faye announces.

Ignoring her comment, Mike shakes his head "There s no way that's Madmax."

"Yeah, girls don't play video games," adds Will.

Faye frowns at him "Oh yeah? So how come I always beat you?"

Dustin and Lucas snigger as Will's face flushes "You're different, but most girls don't."

"Even if they did, you can't get 750,000 points on Dig Dug. I mean that's impossible," Mike insists.

"But her name is Max," says Lucas.

"So?" Mike counters.

"So how many Maxes do you know?"

"I don't know."

"Zero, that's how many."

Dustin nods "Yeah and she shows up at school the day after someone with her same name breaks our top score, I mean, you kidding me?"

"Exactly! So she's gotta be Madmax. She's gotta be," Lucas states with finality.

"And plus she skateboards so she's pretty awesome," Dustin grins.

Mike glares at him "Awesome? You haven't even spoken a word to her!"

"She skateboards and she likes video games, what more do you want?" asks Faye.

"Yeah, I mean just look at her-" Dustin cuts himself off as they turn around and realize Max has disappeared "Shit! I've lost the target."

"There!" says Will, gesturing towards the other side of the building. The party watches as Max throws a crumpled piece of paper into the trash before heading inside. It takes them all of three seconds to unanimously dash over to the trash can, with Mike trailing behind.

"Got it!" Dustin exclaims after diving straight into the pile of garbage. He unfurls the paper to see the words 'Stop spying on me, creeps!' scrawled across it. Faye bursts out laughing.

"Case and point- she's awesome!"

"William Byers?"

The group turn around in surprise to see Mr. Foster, the History teacher, standing in front of them looking expectantly at Will. "Your mother is here."

Will's face falls as he realizes it's time for his appointment. The others mirror his expression. With a small sigh, Will quietly says goodbye and is led off by Mr. Foster. With all the excitement over Halloween, Faye had completely forgotten Will's next appointment was due. Every few weeks he had to go into Hawkins National Lab and have a bunch of wires stuck to him while he was poked and prodded and questioned about the Upside Down. Faye couldn't fathom what purpose these appointments served. They only seemed to make Will uncomfortable and anxious every time he thought about going in. The rest of them had all been instructed to go back to normal, to try to forget everything that had happened last November- but Will was being forced to re-live it over and over again. How was he supposed to go back to normal like that?

"You think he's okay?" asks Dustin.

"He's always weird when he has to go in," Lucas points out.

Mike isn't convinced "I don't know, he was quiet today."

"He's always quiet," says Lucas.

Faye shakes her head "No, something's up."

Mike turns to her "What do you mean?"

The words are on the tip of her tongue, but Faye promised she wouldn't say anything to the others about the notes in Will's locker. Mike is looking at her with his 'what aren't you telling me' face and she doesn't want to lie, but she won't break her promise.

"Just that he was worried about the appointment. Maybe that's why he was weird last night." It's not technically a lie and although Mike's eyes linger on her questioningly for a moment, he doesn't push the matter.

Later that evening at the dinner table, their mom informs them they have to donate two boxes of toys each to the upcoming yard sale. Faye just hums in agreement, not having paid much attention to the conversation. She wants to call Will to see how the appointment went, but she doesn't want to seem like she's checking up on him. Faye snaps out of her thoughts when she hears Mike raise his voice.

"I didn't steal, I borrowed it!"

Their mom has her serious face on "Oh and you didn't curse at Mr. Kowalski last week either, right? Or plagiarize that essay? Or graffiti the bathroom stall?"

"Everyone graffiti's the bathroom stall," says Mike.

"They do mom," Faye agrees.

"So if your friend jumps off a cliff, you're gonna jump too?" their dad asks through a mouthful of chicken.

Their mom puts down her fork with a sigh "Look we know you've had a hard year Michael, but we've been patient. This isn't strike one, this

isn't even strike three." She gestures to Faye "Your sister's been through everything you have and she doesn't do all these things."

A twinge of guilt settles in Faye's stomach. That isn't strictly true. She and Mike have both been through hell over the past year, but the difference is Faye has her best friend back. Will had been found, and while Mike is Will's best friend too, he also had a very close bond with Eleven. And she's gone. All of them were devastated when El sacrificed herself to destroy the Demogorgon, but it hit Mike the hardest. From the moment they found El in the woods, he had been the one to take care of her, to help her, to believe her when no-one else did.

Faye knows Mike is only acting out because he's hurt. That's just the way he is. Mike isn't really one for hugs and deep emotional conversations, he prefers to just deal with things on his own. And right now, the hurt plus teenage boy hormones is turning him into a bit of a troublemaker. Of course, she can't explain any of this to their mom, so she just sits quietly.

The remainder of dinner passes in awkward silence, then Faye and Mike head up to their bedroom to start sorting through the toys. They've always shared a room, ever since they were brought back from the hospital. Their parents hadn't been expecting twins, but they didn't have the money to move to a bigger house. Most of the time Faye doesn't mind; it's only when Mike is being particularly moody-like now- that she wishes she could have her own space. Sometime she'll stay up late sketching and Mike will yell at her for keeping the light on when he's trying to sleep. Or he'll leave a mess on her side of the room then refuse to tidy it up, saying "it's your side, so it's your mess." Faye is secretly hoping that when Nancy goes off to college in a few years she can have her room, but until then she just has to deal with Mike's temper.

"Mom wouldn't be so harsh if she knew," says Faye.

"Knew what?" Mike mumbles.

"About Eleven."

Mike doesn't respond to this and goes back to throwing toys into the

cardboard box in front of him, with more force than is necessary. Normally Faye would just let it drop, but she's worried about him.

"I know you try to call her every night on the radio."

Mike's head snaps up "You've been spying on me?!"

"Mike it's okay," Faye's voice softens "I miss her too."

For a moment, Mike looks like he's about to explode at her, but then the anger seems to drain out of him. As if he doesn't have the energy for it anymore. He sits back on his bed on the opposite side of the room, his fingers fiddling with the dinosaur toy in his hands.

"I just wish I could see her again. Just once."

Faye nods "Me too."

There's a brief spell of silence before Faye grins and says in a teasing voice "You kissed her didn't you?"

Mike grabs the nearest pillow and throws it across the room at Faye's head.

3. Chapter 3

"Mom, come on that's enough!" Faye insists as her mother forces her to pose for the tenth photograph that morning.

"I'm almost done I swear! Just a couple more," her mom answers, bending down to collect the Polaroids scattered on the ground at her feet.

Mike crosses his arms impatiently "We're gonna be late!"

"Okay okay, just one more of the two of you together!"

Faye and Mike grudgingly stand next to each other as their mom takes what they hope is the final picture of the them in their Ghostbusters costumes. Their dad bought the camera last year, supposedly to photograph local wildlife- which he never did; then their mom discovered it gathering dust in the attic and had been glued to the damn thing ever since. Any time something remotely noteworthy happened, out came the camera. A rose in the flower patch. Nancy in a new dress. A nice family meal (although those were decidedly rare). The most recent, and disturbing, one was Holly potty training.

"Why are you taking pictures of that?!" Mike had asked in disgust.

"It's an important achievement and I want to document it for her," their mom reasoned.

"What, so she can show the photos at her graduation?" Faye quipped, earning a reproachful look in return.

Finally, the two of them make it out of the house and on their way to school. In all fairness, their mom has done a good job on the costumes; although biking in a dress isn't the most sensible decision Faye has ever made, and she has to bundle the skirt around her waist to stop it from snagging on the pedals. They meet up with Lucas and Dustin on the corner and Will is waiting by the bike-stands outside school. Initially, they are all overcome with excitement, but suddenly Mike frowns and turns to Lucas.

"Whoa whoa whoa, why are you Venkman?"

"Because I'm Venkman," Lucas answers.

"No I'm Venkman!"

"Why can't there just be two Venkmans?" Will shrugs.

Faye notices the label on Mike's costume, it having previously been covered by his pack strap, and has a disturbing realization "You can't be Venkman."

Her brother glares at her "What do you mean I can't be Venkman?!"

"Because Venkman and Dana get together and I'm Dana!"

Mike's face twists into an expression of revulsion "EW, GROSS!"

"Exactly! So you can't be Venkman!" Faye states matter-of-factly.

"Thank you," says Lucas, grinning in triumph.

Mike shakes his head "It's not like we're gonna act stuff out from the movie! Look, we planned this months ago!"

Faye rolls her eyes as Mike continues to argue his point, but Dustin's shouts soon silence their quarreling "Guys? Why is no-one else wearing costumes?"

An unpleasant sinking feeling erupts in the pit of Faye's stomach as she glances around and realizes Dustin is right. They are the only ones in the entire school wearing costumes. People have already started pointing and sniggering as they walk past. Faye isn't usually one for cursing, but the words "Son of a bitch!" are expelled from her mouth with considerable vigor.

The day passes in a blur of embarrassment. Thankfully, the group have all the same classes so at least they're suffering together; if Faye had to face the prospect of being the only one in the room with a costume on she would have hid in the bathroom rather than endure the humiliation. She loses count of the number of times someone shouts "Who ya gonna call?" or "Nerds!" in the hallway. Glancing at

Will, Faye wonders whether 'Nerd' is worse than 'Zombie Boy,' and decides that it isn't. Nerd is a generic insult, but Zombie Boy only applies to Will- singles him out. At least there are no notes in his locker today.

After class, Dustin and Lucas ask if Faye minds Max coming Trick or Treating with them that evening. Faye happily agrees, as does Will, but she points out that Mike won't like it. The others are too excited to consider this and they hurriedly run off to find Max. Faye and Will exchange knowing looks, wondering how long it will take for Dustin and Lucas to start fighting over the new girl. By the time the final bell rings, Faye is flooded with relief.

"*Thank God,*" she exclaims "I thought this day would never end."

Will nods, mirroring her expression "Same."

"Oh well, at least now we can start getting ready for the best night of the year! Even if we have to deal with Mike being moody the whole time."

Will is strangely quiet and Faye tilts her head at him "What's wrong?"

"Jonathan has to come with us tonight. Come with me anyway..." Will says in a bitter tone. Faye's first instinct is to comfort him, but she knows that will just make him feel worse. So instead she attempts lightheartedness.

"Oh, well that's okay. Jonathan's cool"

"Yeah," is all Will says in response. Faye lets the issue drop. If Will wanted to talk about it he would, but he's clearly sick of talking about everything. The only thing she- all of them- can do is to try to be as normal as possible. So she says goodbye to Will then goes to meet the others and heads home, hoping they'll be able to cheer him up later.

Faye, Mike, Dustin and Lucas spend the afternoon watching scary films (although it's hard to be scared when Lucas is screaming like a girl and making them laugh the whole time), waiting for it to get dark. Faye warns the others not to comment on the fact Jonathan will

be joining them. Dustin and Lucas don't mention Max, so Faye guesses she already had someone to go Trick or Treating with. Bags in hand and costumes donned, they head outside at 6.30PM just as Jonathan's car pulls up. To their surprise, Will exits alone and runs over smiling wider than he has in months. Faye can't help but smile back, having almost forgotten how infectious Will's happiness is. How he can go from the quiet one to the heart and soul of the group, if he wants to.

With years of Trick or Treating expertise at their disposal, the gang know exactly which route to take to ensure they get the best haul. Which houses have the most candy. What shortcuts are the quickest. Where the grouchiest neighbors live that never answer the door and turn the sprinklers on if anyone sets foot on their lawns. As they walk past one such neighbor, Lucas pushes Dustin onto the grass they all scream with laughter as he zigzags to avoid the water sprays. To Mike's annoyance, Max pounces on them a few streets in and he proceeds to sulk and trail behind.

Faye pulls faces into the video camera Will has borrowed from Bob- his mom's new boyfriend- and Will laughs, before glancing back over his shoulder. "You think he's okay?"

"Mike? He's just being a baby."

Max grimaces "Well he clearly doesn't like me very much."

Lucas quickly jumps in "He's always been moody, that's his thing."

"Yeah," Dustin agrees "Mike is the moody one. Will's the quiet one. Faye's the smart one. Lucas is-"

"The handsome one," Lucas interrupts, grinning at Max. Faye and Will bite their lips to keep from laughing.

"Clearly *I'm* the handsome one," Dustin counters, winking at Max.

While Dustin and Lucas try to impress a bemused Max, Will falls back to walk next to Mike- probably so that he won't feel left out. Faye doesn't understand what her brother's problem is. He hasn't even given Max a chance. They continue down the street for a few more

minutes, then suddenly Mike cries out from behind them.

"Will?!"

Faye spins around. Mike is standing alone, turning madly on the spot and shouting Will's name. "What happened? Where's Will?"

"I don't know! I turned my back for like one second and he was gone!" says Mike.

"There!" Faye shouts, spotting Will huddled behind a wall. She and Mike sprint over to him and his expression sends a cold shiver down Faye's spine. His eyes are completely glassed over and his movements are twitchy and unnatural, like he's not controlling them.

Faye grabs his shoulders "Will Will! Are you okay?"

Will shrieks and appears to snap out of whatever daze he was in. He's panting heavily and his eyes dart in different directions like he's looking for something. Mike shoves her out of the way.

"Will, what's wrong? We couldn't find you, are you hurt?"

"Holy shit!" Dustin exclaims as he, Lucas and Max run over. Will is still shaking and whimpering, seemingly unable to answer them. Faye frantically scans his body looking for any injuries, but there don't appear to be any.

"I'm gonna get you home okay," Mike announces, pulling Will to his feet.

"I'll come with you," says Faye.

"No!"

Will's shout is so loud, each and every one of them jump. Suddenly Faye finds breathing difficult as she processes what Will has said. Will stares at her, looking as surprised as the rest of them about what just came out of his mouth, then he drops his gaze and there's silence.

Mike puts an arm around Will's shoulders "Just keep Trick or Treating, I'm bored anyways."

With that, he escorts Will away and the group are left standing in disbelief. Faye doesn't understand what just happened. One minute Will was fine, then the next he was having some sort of fit. And why didn't he want her to go with him? Her chest clenches painfully. Will had never yelled at her like that before.

Faye is vaguely aware of the others starting a conversation, but she doesn't pay any attention. She feels the tell-tale sting of tears in her eyes and quickly blinks them away as Dustin puts a hand on her shoulder "You okay?"

"Fine," she answers, annoyed at how not-fine her voice sounds.

They visit a few more houses, but the appeal of Trick or Treating has somewhat worn off after Mike and Will's departure. Faye walks silently a few paces behind the others, replaying the last hour over and over again in her head- trying to figure out what went wrong. What triggered Will's strange behavior. A surge of fear grips her as she wonders whether Will might have had some sort of flashback to the Upside Down; from what she's read on PTSD, it's a fairly common occurrence. *No* her mind reasons *He would have said if that were the case.*

It just doesn't make sense, and Faye can't pretend Will's outburst didn't hurt. A lot. They're all best friends in the party, but it would be a lie to say they're all equally close. Dustin and Lucas have numerous private jokes the rest of them aren't in on, and obviously Faye and Mike (being twins) have a close relationship the others will never fully understand. But if she had to choose one person who knew her better than anyone, it's Will. She loves her brother to pieces, but sometimes he can be a real asshole and usually when that happens, Will is the person she confides in.

And vice versa. For example, no-one else knows that Will is secretly terrified of spiders. Or that he had a crush on Sophia Preston in first grade. Or that he keeps a box of Reese's hidden in Castle Byers that he only ever shares with Faye. At their first sleepover after Will's dad left, he pretended he was okay to the others, but spent all night crying his eyes out on Faye's shoulder once they were asleep. She and Will tell each other everything, no matter what. So why won't he tell her what's wrong now?

Inexplicably, she thinks of Eleven. Faye wishes she was still around so that she could talk to her. Even though El never said very much, she always seemed to say the right thing when she did.

"Faye."

Faye drops her bag of candy.

"Faye."

That's Eleven's voice. She'd know it anywhere.

"Eleven?!" Faye cries, scanning up and down the sidewalk to pinpoint the source of the voice. There are a few Trick or Treating stragglers, but the street is mostly empty- Dustin, Lucas and Max being quite a ways ahead. Eleven is nowhere to be seen.

"Faye?" The others are running back towards her "What's wrong?" asks Lucas.

"I-I don't know," says Faye, her eyes still flitting to every dark corner and garden hedge to see if she can spot her. "I thought I heard Eleven's voice."

"Eleven?" Lucas questions, turning around to look too "Where?"

"Who's Eleven?" asks Max.

Ignoring the question, Faye shakes her head "I must have just imagined it."

"Are you sure?" Dustin presses.

"Where did it come from?" adds Lucas.

"Who's Eleven?!" Max repeats.

Faye loses her grip on her temper "It doesn't matter!"

The group stares at her, equal parts surprised and worried. Eventually Dustin- ever the peace keeper- says "Maybe we should just go home."

Faye nods, picking up her bag of candy and starting back up the

street.

They walk home mostly in silence. When Faye opens the front door, Mike runs downstairs to greet her. "Hey, how was Trick or Treating?"

Faye just shrugs, brushing past him to head upstairs. All she wants to do is go to bed and have this horrible day be over. But Mike has other ideas.

"Will just left, his mom came and got him. He said to tell you he's sorry about earlier and that he's not feeling well."

Faye frowns. Not feeling well? She's seen Will when he isn't feeling well before and it's never been like that, but frankly she's too tired to argue. "Whatever."

Mike's voice softens "Look, don't be mad at him okay? He's going through a lot."

"You think I don't know that?!" Faye snaps.

"I'm just saying!"

"Yeah well he's not the only one," Faye mutters under her breath, attempting to get past Mike again, but he isn't having it.

"What do you mean?"

Faye sighs "I thought I heard Eleven's voice tonight."

Mike stares at her intently "Where?"

"It wasn't her, must have just been in my head," Faye answers. "Was weird though."

Mike pauses a moment before he speaks "I thought I heard her last night, too."

Faye looks up "On the radio?"

Her brother nods. A tiny spark of hope flares in Faye's chest "You don't think there's a chance she's still out there?"

"No," Mike says after several moments. "We saw what happened...she's gone."

Faye knows her brother well enough to see when he's lying, but she also knows why. Mike desperately wants to believe Eleven is still out there, Faye knows he does, but there's a good chance she isn't. Building up hope only to have it torn down again just makes the pain of losing someone even worse. She knows that first-hand.

4. Chapter 4

She intends go straight to her bedroom, but Faye's feet carry her down into the basement. She barely makes it to the bottom before she collapses, grabbing hold of the banister for support. The pain is unbearable. Her body feels like it's shutting down, like all of her organs are choking and her muscles seizing up. The tears streaming from her eyes are unlike any she's ever felt; they are burning hot and acidic, leaving a nasty sting in their wake.

Suddenly Mike is beside her, his arms pull her against him and he buries his face in her hair. The sobs wracking his body join her own and it is all either of them can do to sit there and cry for a very long time. The worst thing that could have possibly happened has happened. Faye's eyes are squeezed shut in an attempt to block out the image, but it's there, etched into her mind. Unrelenting. The ambulance. The police cars. The quarry. The orange stretcher with Will's body on it.

Faye doesn't know how much time has passed when she opens her eyes. She feels dazed, like she isn't really there. Like she left her soul behind at that quarry. Faye doesn't really know what a soul is, whether they are even real. But it seems to be the only accurate description of how she feels. Hollow. Cold. An empty shell. It occurs to her now why she came down to the basement. She feels closer to him here. How many thousands of hours did they spend together in this room. A room he will never be in again.

A tiny sob attracts her attention and Faye looks up. All at once, the pain gives way to fury. "You."

With a sudden burst of energy, Faye springs to her feet and marches over to where Eleven is shivering on the couch. "You lied! You're a liar!" Faye screams the words in her face, grabbing Eleven's shoulders and shaking them "You said he was alive, you liar! You liar! You liar!"

"Faye stop! Stop it! Please, Faye!" Mike is pulling her back, but Faye breaks out of his grip.

"Why are you helping her?! She told us he was alive, and he's not. He's dead!" Faye doubles over at the words. It's the first time she's actually said it out loud.

"I know, I know, but this won't bring him back" says Mike in a defeated voice. Unnoticed by the Wheelers, Eleven slips away to her makeshift bed under the table.

Faye clutches her waist, convinced she is literally holding herself together. Worried that if she lets go she will break completely, and might not be able to put herself back again. She glances at Mike who is watching her with a pained expression.

"What do we do now?" she breathes.

Mike shakes his head "I don't know."

The grating buzz of the radio tears through the room. It crackles in and out, straining to pick up a signal, and then they hear it.

"So you got to let me know."

Faye stops breathing.

"Should I stay or should I go?"

The twins look over and see Eleven huddled under the table holding Mike's radio, fresh blood seeping from her nostril. She stares at Faye imploringly.

"Will?!" Mike cries.

"Should I stay or should I go now?"

Mike has the radio out of Eleven's hand in a heartbeat "Will! Will! Are you there? Will, it's me Mike! Will!"

The signal hisses and Mike tries again, desperately calling Will's name over and over, but there's no response. With a final screech, the connection dissolves into silence.

Faye is rooted to the spot. She refuses to believe what she has just heard.

"Was that-" Mike stutters.

"Will," Eleven confirms.

Mike's words are cautiously hopeful "He-he's alive?"

Eleven nods.

A scoff rips from Faye's throat. She pierces Eleven with a glare and when she speaks, her voice is venom "Why should we believe you?"

The short-haired girl gets to her feet and approaches Faye, as Mike watches nervously in the background. Eleven looks her directly in the eye, wide and unblinking "Friends don't lie."

Faye holds her gaze. She waits for the anger to bite again, the urge to shove Eleven away and scream at her. But it doesn't come. The hazel eyes before her are frightened, pained and exhausted, but they are not deceitful. Unwittingly, Faye finds herself trusting them. And that means...it's true.

Will is alive.

The next day at school, Will is waiting for her on the steps.

"Hey," he says when she approaches.

"Hey," Faye answers.

Will looks guilty when he speaks "I'm really sorry about yesterday. I didn't mean to snap at you, I just felt really sick all of a sudden and I didn't want you to see me throw up."

Faye considers this "Why didn't you just say that?"

"I don't know, I'm sorry."

There's something about Will's explanation that doesn't seem right, but he does sound genuinely apologetic and he's giving Faye the puppy dog face, so she relents.

"Okay."

Will looks quietly hopeful "So we're okay?"

Faye nods "Yeah, we're okay."

A relieved smile spreads across Will's face and he reaches into his

backpack to pull out a bulging plastic bag. "Here," he hands it to Faye.

"What's this?"

"It's all the Reese's from my Halloween candy. You have them."

Faye looks at him "But they're your favorite."

"They're your favorite too," Will's smile morphs into his rarely-seen wolfish grin "Plus, if the apology didn't work I had to have a backup, right?"

This draws a laugh from Faye "Oh I see, so you were going to bribe me?"

Will's grin widens "If that's what it took."

Faye shoves his shoulder, still laughing, just as the bell rings for class.

Uncharacteristically, Dustin bursts into Mr. Clarke's lesson 10 minutes late. He's usually the first one there. He then proceeds to whisper urgently that they all need to meet in the AV room after school as he has something "unbelievable" to show them. So at 3PM the group, plus Max, find themselves locked in the AV room hovering over Dustin's Ghostbusters trap.

"His name is D'artagnan," says Dustin proudly. D'artagnan appears to be a bizarre slug-like lizard. Faye has never seen anything like it before. Apparently Dustin found him in his trash the previous night and decided to keep him as a pet, whatever he is. "Cute right?"

Mike raises his eyebrows "D'artagnan?"

"Dart for short," Dustin clarifies.

"And he was in your trash?" asks Max.

Dustin nods "Foraging for food. You wanna hold him?"

Max quickly shakes her head, but Dustin is already passing the creature to her. "Oh God, he's slimy!" she exclaims, tipping Dart into

Lucas' hands.

Dart is quickly passed around the group, all of whom are repulsed by him. His skin- which is surprisingly cold- sticks to Faye's hand and oozes a sticky, snot-like mucus. She shudders and hurriedly gives Dart to Mike, wiping the slime off on her pant leg.

"He could be poisonous you know!" Faye asserts.

Lucas points at Dustin accusingly "If I start coming out in a rash, you are dead meat!"

Ignoring them, Dustin produces a stack of library books from his backpack and insists that he's discovered a new species. Faye wrinkles her nose at Dart- whatever he is, she doesn't like him. Out of the corner of her eye she notices Will staring at Dart intently, but not in a repulsed way. Almost like he's scared of him. Eventually, they decide to show Dart to Mr. Clarke and file out of the AV room.

"Faye?" says Will as they're walking down the hall.

Faye turns around "Yeah?"

Will looks nervous and lowers his voice "I don't think Dart is a new species."

"What do you mean?"

There is a pause before Will answers "I think he's from the Upside Down."

A chill steals through her "What?"

Will swallows thickly "I saw something like him last year, only it didn't have a tail. Then yesterday I heard..."

"Heard what?" Faye presses.

Her question goes unanswered "The point is I don't think we should be showing him to Mr. Clarke."

Will's expression is deadly serious and his voice has this conviction to

it that Faye has never heard before. She knows he's not messing around. The two of them sprint down the hall after the others, praying they're not too late. Faye rounds the corner and spots them about to knock on Mr. Clarke's door.

"Stop!"

Dustin, Lucas, Mike and Max all turn to look at her, but before they can ask questions Faye snatches the trap out of Dustin's hands. Dart squeals in protest at the sudden movement.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Dustin exclaims, attempting to grab it back.

Faye flinches away from him "We can't show him to Mr. Clarke."

Dustin frowns "What are you talking about?"

"Just trust me," Faye insists. The metal box begins to shake and Dart's screams grow louder.

Dustin tries to wrestle it out of Faye's arms "Give him back! He's scared!"

"Dustin stop!" Faye snaps, twisting her body away from him.

"Let go of her!" Will shouts, trying to shove Dustin off.

Faye holds on as hard as she can, but Dustin is stronger than her. Eventually, he manages to pry it out of her hands, but in the commotion the trap springs open and Dart leaps out. He lands on the floor with a splat and quickly scampers away, trailing droplets of slime.

"Son of a bitch!" Dustin yells. He glares at Faye "What the hell is your problem?!"

A retort is on the tip of Faye's tongue, but she is aware they are in the middle of a school corridor- not to mention in front of Max. She glances at Will, who answers for her. "We have to find him before someone else does."

"Can someone please tell me what's going on here?" Lucas asks.

The group split up to look for Dart. Faye volunteers herself and Max to search the West side of the building, knowing this will enable Will to explain to the others what's going on. Will nods at her and the boys disappear down the hall- with Dustin shooting Faye a dirty look as he passes.

Once they're alone, Max says "No offense, but you guys are totally crazy."

"You have no idea," Faye answers.

The two girls start searching the West-side classrooms; pulling open every drawer, looking under every desk and tipping out every trash can. As they hunt for Dart, a sinister feeling envelopes Faye. Like the kind you get when you're alone in the house and you hear a noise. You know something bad is going to happen, but you don't know exactly what or when. And that isn't all. In her urgency to stop Dustin showing Dart to Mr. Clarke, Faye had overlooked Will's evasiveness, but as she plays the conversation over in her head she realizes he never said *where* he saw Dart last year. At first she assumed it was the Upside Down, but he had started to say something about yesterday then stopped himself. Could that have been what triggered his fit? And if so, why didn't he say anything?

"Are you okay?"

Faye is pulled from her thoughts "Huh?"

"You haven't said a word in like a half hour," Max points out.

"Sorry," Faye mumbles, focusing on the janitor's closet she is rifling through.

Max sighs "Look, there's clearly stuff going on that I don't know about, but you can trust me. Honest."

Faye stays silent. It's not that they don't trust Max (apart from Mike, for some reason), it's that they can't tell her anything. They'd get into so much trouble, not to mention put her in danger.

"It's about Will isn't it?" Max continues "Lucas told me about him going missing last year. Is that why he freaked out yesterday? Did he have some sort of panic attack?"

"I really can't talk about it."

Max rolls her eyes "Come on, you gotta give me something," she pauses before adding "Can you at least tell me why your brother hates me so much?"

Faye laughs humorlessly "I honestly don't know. You'll have to ask him."

Speak of the devil, Mike suddenly appears at the opposite end of the hall and heads into the gym. A determined expression spreads across Max's face "Fine, I will."

With that, she marches off in pursuit of Mike. Faye doesn't bother trying to stop her.

By now, Faye must have searched a dozen rooms in the school and Dart is still nowhere to be found. *Where are you, you little bastard?* she wonders. Faye thinks hard, trying to narrow down the places he could be. He doesn't like light or heat, so it's unlikely he went outside. Where in the school is it dark and cold? Suddenly it clicks. The bathroom.

Faye is about to head down the hall when what she sees stops her cold. There is a figure standing outside the doors to the gym, clad in a dark jacket and light blue jeans. From this angle, the person's mess of unkempt brown hair obscures most of their face, but there's just something about the way they stand that is profoundly familiar. *No. It can't be.*

"Eleven?"

The figure dips their head and glimpses in Faye's direction through the curtain of hair. Faye still can't make out their face. Then without warning the figure wheels around and walks in the opposite direction.

"Wait!" Faye calls, running after them.

She skids around the corner just in time to catch sight of the blue jeans disappearing down another corridor. Faye gives chase, seeming to be just one step behind the figure at every turn. It almost feels like they *want* Faye to follow them. After a hot pursuit across the length of the school, Faye is panting hard and jumps down a small flight of steps to see the figure slipping out of the main doors. She goes to follow, but a voice suddenly calls out from behind her.

"Faye!" Mike cries "Have you seen Will?!"

Faye doesn't like the panic in Mike's tone "I thought he was with you guys?"

The sound of footsteps thunders towards them and a moment later Lucas barrels around the corner "He's in the field! There's something really wrong."

The boys run off immediately, but for a brief moment Faye is torn. Something is telling her she should follow the figure. Like she's somehow drawn to them. What if it really is Eleven? What if she's come back? But Lucas said something is "really wrong." If something is really wrong with Will, then he needs her. This thought makes up her mind and Faye sprints after Lucas and Mike.